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S E C R E T RIYADH 000922

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DEPT PLEASE PASS TO NEA/ARP FOR SWALKER/BSHUKAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/01/2027
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [ASEC](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: A VICTORY IN THE SAUDI WAR ON TERROR

REF: RIYADH 9067

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael Gfoeller
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: The Saudi Ministry of Interior (MOI) recently reported to the press that it detained 172 suspected terrorists, dismantled seven terror cells, and seized large amounts of weapons and explosives, along with SR 20 million (USD 5.3 million). The arrests and seizures occurred over the past several months and are part of the SAG's ongoing counterterrorism strategy and propaganda effort. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The Saudi press recently reported that it detained 172 suspected terrorists, dismantled seven terror cells, and seized weapons, explosives, ammunition, computers, and SR 20 million (USD 5.3 million). The Saudi press also reported that the arrests and seizures occurred over several months, with one news source reporting the timeframe as four months. The majority of the detainees are Saudis, though there are also foreigners. MOI claimed that all of the arrestees had adopted "Takfiri ideology," meaning that, as Muslims, they branded other Muslims as infidels. Among the detainees, some received training as pilots outside of Saudi Arabia in order to carry out terror attacks within the Kingdom. The proposed terror targets were Saudi public figures, Saudi oil facilities, and military bases in and outside of Saudi Arabia. Many weapons were found in the desert, including grenade launchers, plastic explosives, ammunition, cartridges, handguns, and rifles.

¶3. (S/NF) SAG sources have confirmed to Post the arrests and seizures, noting that, as with previous "roundups" (reftel), they occurred over several months. Saudi officials issued a similar public statement in late 2006 announcing the arrest of 136 suspected terrorists, all of whom had also been detained over several months prior to the announcement. The SAG also noted that the current announcement included multiple unrelated cells and support networks in the early stages of operational planning. Post does not yet have a list of the detainees.

¶4. (C) Reaction among Saudis has been mostly positive; however, some believe that the arrests and seizures were made in one day. Many of the websites and weblogs express support for the SAG, and most convey the belief that there are still many terrorists in the Kingdom. Some Saudis believe that the arrests were positive, accepting that extremism is dangerous for the stability of the country. However, some of our local contacts also suggest that liberals and "western" elements are equally, or more, dangerous because of the effects of

secularizing ideas and influences. A few local contacts expressed the belief that the arrests and seizures happened a long time ago, but that the SAG waited until now to publicize the events in order to fully benefit from good press. One Saudi expressed his belief that the operations were false, and several were suspicious regarding the honesty of the MOI's report.

15. (S/NF) Comment: These arrests are part of a wide-ranging, comprehensive program to combat extremism in the Kingdom. The public disclosure is part of the SAG's "propaganda," and its broader public relations campaign aimed at maintaining public support for ongoing efforts to combat terrorism. The SAG's comprehensive program includes the reeducation and reintegration of extremists, commercials denouncing terrorism, monitoring mosque sermons and extremist websites, as well as efforts to counter terrorist financing. The latest press release was clearly successful in getting the attention of the Saudi public and press, as well as that of the international media. Saudi efforts to publicize these latest successes against terrorist elements were well received based on international press coverage and Arab media reaction. However, the arrest of 172 individuals is a clear indicator that extremism and terrorism remain a major problem in Saudi Arabia. End Comment.
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